MARK BRADFORD

The Prayer Life of the Leader

I am married to Sarah and we have three children: Caleb (18), Anna (16), and Phoebe (13). We also have a lovely, but slightly crazy, black cocker spaniel called Alfie. I am the vicar of St Thomas' Lancaster in the Diocese of Blackburn, and have been in post since September 2023. Arrow was such a help to me when I did it in 2018-19 and continues to impact me.

Before Preston, we lived in Ripon (where I served my curacy), Nottingham (where I trained at St John's College) and Leeds (from where I commuted to Harrogate to work as a secondary school History and Politics teacher for nine years). I loved being a teacher but felt called to teach and train people for worship, discipleship and mission. I tried to find other avenues to do this, including co-ordinating, part -time, the Oasis Trust gap year programme, Frontline, for three years, but eventually felt led to do it as a vicar.

I grew up in north Devon and have always had a love of the sea, the beach and coast. In spite of the notorious weather of the north-west, I love the outdoors and enjoy walking with Sarah (and, sometimes more begrudgingly, our children too). I find so much energy by being out and about in places of beauty like the Lake District, and walking the coast in different places. I also love going running, listening to music, reading all sorts, eating good food, and spending time with friends.

MARK BRADFORD
Vicar, St Thomas Lancaster
St Thomas Church, Marton Street, Lancaster, LA1 1XX
T 01524 590410
E mark@st.tees.org.uk

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 1

What is prayer? Why do we pray? Why can it be so hard to pray?

May we learn to love learning, O Lord,
for the world is yours, and all things in it speak —each in their way—of you:
of your mind,
your designs,
your artistry,
your power,
your unfolding purpose.

All knowledge is your knowledge.
All wisdom your wisdom.

Therefore, as we apply ourselves to learning,
may we be mindful that all created things are your creative expression,
that all stories are held within your greater story,
and that all disciplines of order and design are a chasing after your thoughts—
so that greater mastery of these subjects will yield ever greater knowledge of the symmetry and wonder of your ways.

God grant us, your children, discernment and wisdom,
Guard us from error.

God grant us, your children, knowledge and understanding,
Lead us to truth.

God bless the labours of this new season.
Shape us for your service.

Amen.

Every Moment Holy, Volume 1 – A Liturgy for Students and Scholars

KEY INSIGHTS

'Find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer.'

Albert Einstein

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 1

WHAT IS PRAYER?

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 1

WHY DO WE PRAY?

KEY INSIGHTS

'The reason why we pray is simply that we cannot help praying.'
William James

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 1

WHY CAN PRAYER BE SO HARD?

'Many of those I talked to experienced prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. They regarded it as important, even paramount, and felt guilty about their failure, blaming themselves.

'Why does prayer rank so high on surveys of theoretical importance and so low on surveys of actual satisfaction?... In theory prayer is the essential human act, a priceless point of contact with the God of the universe. In practice prayer is often confusing and fraught with frustration.'

From Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?, Philip Yancey (Zondervan).

KEY INSIGHTS

'It took me a long time to realize this, but I think that what seems to be our sheer incompetence in prayer is actually the place where something is happening: it is God invading our willed vulnerability.'

Sarah Coakley

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 2

How do we (really) view God and how do we (actually) relate to God as leaders?

PASSAGES TO EXPLORE:

PSALM 27

LUKE 15:25-32

LUKE 10:38-42

KEY INSIGHTS

'Nothing conflicts with the love of Christ like service to Christ.'

Henri Nouwen

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 2

MATTHEW 11:28-30

JOHN 15

JOHN 21:1-14

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 2

APPLICATION #1: HOW DO WE SEE GOD?

> 'What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.'
>
> AW Tozer

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 2

APPLICATION #2: HOW DO WE SEE OURSELVES?

> 'Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.'
>
> Brennan Manning

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 2

CONCLUSION

Oswald Chambers says 'No Christian has a special work to do... Our Lord calls to no special work: He calls _____'.

PSALM 73:23-26

23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 3

How far will your current relationship with God sustain you for the life of ministry that is ahead?

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

THE KEY QUESTION

KEY INSIGHTS

'Many set off on pilgrimage with little concept of what the interior journey might mean and meet themselves en route in surprising and sometimes disturbing ways.'

Sacred Places, Pilgrim Paths: An Anthology of Pilgrimage, Martin Robinson (Zondervan, p127)

Pilgrim God,
you are our origin and destination.
travel with us, we pray, in every pilgrimage of faith,
and every journey of the heart.
Give us the courage to set off,
the nourishment we need to travel well,
and the welcome we long for at journey's end.
So we may grow in grace and love of you
and in the service of others
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pocket Prayers for Pilgrims, John Pritchard (CHP)

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 3

SPIRITUAL HEALTH CHECK
https://launch.practicingtheway.org/spiritual-health

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton

KEY INSIGHTS

'Prayers are prophecies. They are the best predictors of your spiritual future. Who you become is determined by how you pray. Ultimately, the transcript of your prayers becomes the script of your life.'

The Circle Maker, Mark Batterson

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 3

Practices of Prayer

THE PSALMS:
- The Psalms are the forgotten prayer book of church history to evangelicals.
- Obviously, they were core to Jesus' way of praying – and have been for almost all of church history.
- They're perceived as too Anglican/Catholic in some places.
- Our diet of worship is shaped more by contemporary worship songs which tend to have a far, far narrower focus than Psalms.
- See Resources in files for praying the Psalms.

PRAYING PRAYERS AND SONGS OF SCRIPTURE:
- Praying the songs and prayers of Scripture:
  1. Prayers of Old Testament.
  2. Prayers of Jesus.
  3. Prayers of Paul.
  4. Prayers of New Testament.
- E.g. Numbers 6:24–26, Proverbs 30:7–9, 1 Kings 3:3–9, 1 Chronicles 4:10, 2 Chronicles 20:6–12, Luke 1, Luke 23:34, John 17, Acts 4:24–30, Ephesians 1:15–23, Ephesians 3:14–21, Romans 11:33–36, Romans 15:13, Jude 24–25, Revelation 22:20.

PRAYING THE LORD'S PRAYER:
- E.g. daily at 12pm
- Section-by-section

PRAYING ANY SCRIPTURE – LECTIO DIVINA:
- **Read** – Lectio (Reading): Slowly and attentively reading a passage of Scripture several times to become familiar with the text.
- **Reflect** – Meditatio (Meditation): Reflecting on the passage and considering how it applies to one's own life. Paying attention to any words or phrases that stand out.
- **Respond** – Oratio (Prayer): Responding to the passage by opening one's heart to God in prayer. Conversing with God about the text and one's reflections.
- **Rest** – Contemplatio (Contemplation): Resting in God's presence and experiencing union with Christ. Letting go of one's own thoughts and simply being with God.

EXAMEN:
- The examen is a daily reflective prayer practice that originated with St. Ignatius of Loyola.
- It is a technique for prayerfully reviewing one's day in order to detect God's presence and discern His direction for the future.
- The key steps of the examen are:
  1. **Become aware of God's presence**. Begin with a pause and deep breaths to centre yourself.
  2. **Review the day with gratitude**. Reflect on what you are especially grateful

KEY INSIGHTS

for from the past day.

3. **Pay attention to your emotions**. Notice where you experienced joy, sadness, anger, etc. and why.
4. **Examine your actions**. Reflect on what you did, said or thought, and consider whether you were drawing closer to or further from God.
5. **Look toward tomorrow**. Consider how you can collaborate more effectively with God's plan in the day ahead.

- The examen is a flexible prayer that can be adapted to one's personal needs and circumstances. It is meant to help develop the habit of prayerful reflection and discernment in daily life.

BREATH PRAYER / ANCHOR PRAYER:

- Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice that involves repeating a short, simple phrase or sentence in sync with one's breathing. The key features of breath prayer are:
  1. It is a very short prayer, usually 6-8 syllables, that can be easily repeated with each inhalation and exhalation.
  2. The prayer often invokes the name of God, Jesus, or another divine name, combined with a request or statement of praise. For example, "Lord Jesus, have mercy" or "Holy Spirit, come."
  3. Breath prayer is meant to be a way of "praying without ceasing" by making the prayer as natural as breathing itself. It can be practiced for extended periods or throughout daily activities.
  4. The practice originated in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, particularly with the "Jesus Prayer" of "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Over time, the prayer was shortened and adapted.
  5. Breath prayer is considered a form of contemplative prayer that helps focus the mind, calm the body, and draw one closer to the presence of God. It combines the physical act of breathing with the spiritual act of prayer.
- The key is to find a short, meaningful phrase that can be easily repeated with each breath, allowing the prayer to become a natural part of one's daily life and spiritual practice.

ORDINAL / COMMISSIONING SERVICE PRAYERS:

In the name of our Lord we bid you remember the greatness of the trust that is now to be committed to your charge. Remember always with thanksgiving that the treasure now to be entrusted to you is Christ's own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It is to him that you will render account for your stewardship of his people.

You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may daily be enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened.

Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(From the Church of England Common Worship Ordination Services)

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 3

PILGRIMAGE:
- E.g. Iona, Lindisfarne…
- Story of St Cuthbert's Way.
- Walking as a spiritual practice…

FASTING:
- Forgotten practice of the church in recent years
- Cf. Mark 9:29

SILENCE / SOLITUDE /STILLNESS:
- A way of fasting from noise / people / movement.
- Not the only way of praying – but a central one à reveals addictions where we're not able to practice it.
- John Mark Comer – Practicing the Way.

JOURNALLING:
- Getting things out of our heads.
- So much of our thinking is redundant – just circling the same thoughts, worries, anxieties and scenarios.
- Journalling can be a powerful way to get in touch with what goes on in our heads, and bring it into our consciousness and bodies.

GRATITUDE:

> 'If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough.'
>
> Meister Eckhart

RETREAT:
- One of our 'rocks' – first things to go in at the start of the year.
- Sometimes denominations factor this in for us, especially early in training.

STATIO:
- A spiritual practice from the monastic tradition that involves taking a brief pause or "holy pause" before transitioning from one activity to another. The key aspects of statio prayer are:
  1. Stop completely and become fully present in the moment, avoiding the temptation to just do a "rolling stop" where you're still mentally engaged in the previous task.
  2. Take a deep, mindful breath to centre yourself and create a space for awareness and connection with God.
  3. Recollect yourself - become aware of where you are, what you've just been doing, and what you're about to do, bringing your full attention to the present moment.
- The purpose of statio is to help you be more conscious and present, rather than rushing mechanically from one thing to the next.
- It's a way to integrate God into the flow of your day by pausing to acknowledge His presence before starting a new activity.

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 3

- Statio can be practiced anytime during the day when transitioning between tasks, such as before answering the phone, starting a meal, or entering a time of prayer.
- The key is to make these brief pauses intentional moments to connect with God in the midst of your daily life.

PRAYING FOR CHURCH/ES BY NAME:
- Pray through e.g. ChurchSuite.
- Neil Hudson will suggest something like this in the first Evangelism session.

PRAYING IN STAFF/BUSINESS/ANNUAL MEETINGS:
- Pray at beginning and end.
- Also pray through items as they come up.
- Don't separate 'business' and 'prayer'!

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 4

Making a Plan

DNA

KEY QUESTIONS FOR YOUR PLAN

- Why?

- When?

KEY INSIGHTS

'The single most important piece of advice about prayer is one word: Begin!'

Prayer for Beginners, Peter Kreeft

'We don't drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer. We do not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must set aside time to do nothing but pray. What we actually do reflects our highest priorities. That means that we can proclaim our commitment to prayer until the cows come home, but unless we actually pray, our actions disown our words.'

A Call to Spiritual Reformation, DA Carson

'Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.'

George Herbert

'Pray without ceasing.'
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 4

- Where?

- What?

- Who?

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Session 4

TWO KEY PRINCIPLES TO PLAN WITH

1.

2.

FINAL BLESSING

May the love of the Father enfold us,
the wisdom of the Son enlighten us,
the fire of the Spirit inflame us;
and may the blessing of the triune God rest on us,
and abide with us,
now and evermore.
Amen.

Author unknown

KEY INSIGHTS

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Quotes About Prayer

'Prayer is a surge of the heart, it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.'
St. Therese of Lisieux

'Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.'
Tim Keller

'Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between his will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit's prayer.'
Elisabeth Elliot

'Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.'
Teresa of Avila

'The whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of God to whom we pray.'
Julian of Norwich

'God warms his hands at man's heart when he prays.'
John Masefield

'Prayer is not monologue, but dialogue; God's voice is its most essential part. Listening to God's voice is the secret of the assurance that he will listen to mine.'
Andrew Murray

'Leaders must be released from the idea that they must be great prayer warriors before they can begin to call others to prayer.'
David Bryant

'Of all the things Christ wants for us, loving him and focusing our attention on him are the most important.'
Charles Stanley

'Prayer is the exercise of drawing on the grace of God.'
Oswald Chambers

'Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.'
Oswald Chambers

'To get nations back on their feet, we must first get down on our knees.'
Billy Graham

'Groanings which cannot be uttered are often prayers which cannot be refused.'
Spurgeon

'Do not make prayer a monologue...make it a conversation.'
Author Unknown

'Pray as you can, not as you can't.'
Dom Chapman

'The wish to pray is a prayer in itself.'
Georges Bernanos

'True prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that. It is a spiritual transaction with the creator of Heaven and Earth.'
Charles Spurgeon

'Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.'
George Herbert

'The great people of the earth today are the people who pray, (not) those who talk about prayer.'
S.D.Gordon

'If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in our Lord's presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour will be very well employed.'
St. Francis de Sales

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Quotes About Prayer

'A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.'

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

'To pray is to change. This is a great grace. How good of God to provide a path whereby our lives can be taken over by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and self-control.'

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard Foster

'If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough.'

Meister Eckhart

'Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of willingness.'

Martin Luther

'To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.'

Karl Barth

'Kingdom praying is an arrangement instituted by God [in which] we learn step by step how to govern, to reign in his kingdom.'

Dallas Willard

'Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the way of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current forces. Prayer infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present. History belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being. Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes. These shapers of the future are the intercessors, who call out of the future the longed-for new present.'

Walter Wink

'Prayer in its highest form and grandest success assumes the attitude of a wrestler with God.'

E.M. Bounds

'Biblical prayer is impertinent, persistent, shameless, indecorous. It is more like haggling in an outdoor bazaar than the polite monologues of the church.'

Walter Wink

'We can be sure our prayers are answered precisely in the way we would want them to be answered if we knew everything God knows.'

Tim Keller

THE PRAYER LIFE OF THE LEADER
Resources For Prayer

PRAYER BOOKS

- 2000 Years of Classic Christian Prayers: A Collection for Public and Personal Use.
- 2000 Years of Prayer.
- Awed To Heaven, Rooted In Earth: Prayers Of Walter Brueggemann.
- Celtic Daily Prayer: Books 1 & 2, Northumbria Community.
- Children's Letters to God: The New Collection.
- Common Prayer, Shane Claiborne.
- Every Moment Holy, Volumes I, II & III.
- The Rhythm of Life - Celtic Daily Prayer, New Edition, David Adam.
- Prayers for Today: A Yearlong Journey of Contemplative Prayer, Kurt Bjorklund.
- Praying the Bible: The Book of Prayers, Wesley & Stacey Campbell.
- Prayers for a Privileged People, Walter Brueggemann.
- Prayers to Start my Day & Prayers to Start my Day, David O'Malley

BOOKS ABOUT PRAYER

- Being with God: The Absurdity, Necessity, and Neurology of Contemplative Prayer The Absurdity, Necessity, and Neurology of Contemplative Prayer (AJ Sherill)
- Dirty Glory: Go Where Your Best Prayers Take You (Red Moon Chronicles #2) (Pete Grieg)
- God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer (Pete Grieg)
- The Lord and His Prayer (Tom Wright)
- Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference? (Philip Yancey)
- Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home (Richard Foster)
- Prayer and Worship: A Spiritual Formation Guide (Renovare)
- Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer (Tyler Staton)
- Red Moon Rising: Rediscover the Power of Prayer (Red Moon Chronicles) (Pete Grieg)

PSALMS

- Answering God: Psalms as Tools for Prayer (Eugene Peterson)
- My Rock; My Refuge: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms (Tim Keller)
- Praying the Psalms (Daniel Bourguet)
- Psalms in 30 Days: CSB Edition (Trevin Wax)
- Spirituality of the Psalms (Walter Brueggemann)
- Walk His Way: Following Christ through the Book of Psalms Following Christ through the Book of Psalms (Andrew G. Shead)

APPS

- Lectio365 – www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/.
- Pray As You Go – https://pray-as-you-go.org/.
- PrayerMate – www.prayermate.net/app.
- Inner Room – www.24-7prayer.com/resource/inner-room/.

COURSES

- 24/7 Courses – https://prayercourse.org/.
  - ⇒ Prayer Course
  - ⇒ Prayer Course II – Unanswered Prayer
  - ⇒ The Lectio Course
- Practising the Way Course – www.practicingtheway.org/course.

OTHER RESOURCES

- The Prayer Course Toolshed – https://prayercourse.org/toolshed/.